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3306th Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 18 March 2014

President **Evangelos Venizelos**
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs

P R E S S

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Main results of the Council

*The Council prepared the **spring European Council** of 20-21 March and held an exchange of views with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy. Apart from discussions on Ukraine, the main focus will be on the economy, including growth, competitiveness and jobs. Industrial competitiveness as well as climate and energy will also feature at the top of the agenda.*

"These are a key priorities for the Greek presidency and for all European societies at this time," said Evangelos Venizelos, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, following the Council.

*The Council established the **European voluntary humanitarian aid corps**. This initiative, provided for in the Lisbon Treaty, will offer thorough training to volunteers and place them in humanitarian organisations according to the needs of beneficiaries.*

*The Council held a first discussion on the Commission communication establishing a framework for addressing systemic threats to the **rule of law** in the 28 member states.*

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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PARTICIPANTS

Belgium:

Mr Dirk WOUTERS

Permanent Representative

Bulgaria:

Mr Todor CHUROV

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Czech Republic:

Mr Lubomír ZAORÁLEK

Mr Tomáš PROUZA

Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for the European Union

Denmark:

Mr Martin LIDEGAARD

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Germany:

Mr Frank-Walter STEINMEIER

Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs

Estonia:

Mr Matti MAASIKAS

Permanent Representative

Ireland:

Mr Paschal DONOHOE

Minister of State for European Affairs (Departments of the
Taoiseach and Foreign Affairs and Trade)

Greece:

Mr Evangelos VENIZELOS

Mr Dimitrios KOURKOULAS

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Spain:

Mr Íñigo MÉNDEZ DE VIGO Y MONTOJO

State Secretary for the European Union

France:

Mr Thierry REPENTIN

Minister with responsibility for European Affairs, attached
to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Croatia:

Ms Vesna PUSIĆ

First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign and
European Affairs

Italy:

Mr Sandro GOZI

Under Secretary in charge of European Policies

Cyprus:

Mr Ioannis KASOULIDES

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Latvia:

Ms Ilze JUHANSONE

Permanent Representative

Lithuania:

Mr Vytautas LEŠKEVIČIUS

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

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Mr Jean ASSELBORN

Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, Minister for
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Hungary:

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State Secretary for EU Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Malta:

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Netherlands:

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS

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Mr Sebastian KURZ

Federal Minister for European and International Affairs

Poland:

Mr Marek PRAWDA

Permanent Representative

Portugal:

Mr Domingos FEZAS VITAL

Permanent Representative

Romania:

Mr George CIAMBA

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovenia:

Mr Igor SENČAR

State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Slovakia:

Mr Peter JAVORČÍK

State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Finland:

Mr Alexander STUBB

Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade

Sweden:

Ms Birgitta OHLSSON

Minister for EU Affairs

United Kingdom:

Mr David LIDINGTON

Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Commission:

Ms Viviane REDING

Vice President

Mr Štefan FÜLE

Member

ITEMS DEBATED

Preparation of the March European Council

The Council examined draft conclusions for the European Council meeting to be held on 20-21 March, and held an exchange of views with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy over lunch.

The spring European Council will focus on:

- *European Semester*: heads of state or government are expected to conclude the first phase of the European Semester and to hold a first discussion on the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy ahead of the planned mid-term review.
- *Industrial competitiveness*: the European Council is expected to discuss principles and priorities related to industrial policy.
- *Climate and energy*: leaders will hold a first policy debate on a framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030.
- *Single resolution mechanism*: on the basis of work done by the Council and in trilogues with the European Parliament, leaders will evaluate results of legislative work and the Intergovernmental Conference.
- *Taxation*: the European Council is expected to call on the Council to adopt the draft directive aimed at strengthening EU rules on the exchange of information concerning the taxation of savings income.
- *Ukraine*: following recent events, the European Council will re-assess the situation in Europe's eastern neighbourhood, in particular in Ukraine.
- *EU-Africa*: leaders will look at the state of preparations for the upcoming EU-Africa summit and have an in-depth policy debate on EU-Africa relations, with a special emphasis on peace and security.

The draft conclusions will be reviewed in the light of the discussion.

An annotated draft agenda was discussed by the Council on 11 February ([5153/14](#)).

European Semester

The Council endorsed the presidency synthesis report on the European Semester in anticipation of the **European Council** on 20-21 March 2014.

The report provides a synthesis of the discussions and main messages of seven different Council configurations¹ involved in the current European Semester exercise ([7699/14](#)).

It gives a broad picture of what is required to prepare the **European Council** and, more generally, to implement the Europe 2020 strategy. The report highlights the most crucial points, namely the focus on implementation, the emerging results and the areas where progress is lacking despite commitments at EU level.

Rule of law mechanism

The Council took note of a presentation by the Commission of its communication on the rule of law mechanism ([7632/14](#) + [7632/14 ADD 1](#)).

The Council had a preliminary exchange of views and agreed to revert to the issue.

The Commission communication sets up a framework for addressing systemic threats to the rule of law in the 28 member states, complementing the infringement procedure (in the case of a breach of EU law) and the so-called Article 7 procedure of the Lisbon Treaty (which allows for the suspension of voting rights in the case of a serious and persistent breach of EU values). The purpose of the framework is to enable the Commission to find a solution with the member state concerned in order to prevent the emergence of a systemic threat to the rule of law that could develop into a clear risk of a serious breach which could trigger the use of Article 7.

Subsidiarity

Over lunch, ministers had a discussion on the principle of subsidiarity on the basis of a background paper drafted by the presidency, following interventions by different member states at previous Council meetings.

¹ Economic and Financial Affairs Council, Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, Competitiveness Council, Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council, Environment Council, Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council and Justice and Home Affairs Council.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**DEVELOPMENT****European voluntary humanitarian aid corps**

The Council established a European voluntary humanitarian aid corps as a framework for joint contributions from European volunteers to support and complement humanitarian aid operations worldwide, as provided for in the Lisbon Treaty. For more details, see press release [7638/14](#).

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS**Eurojust-Republic of Moldova agreement**

The Council approved an agreement on cooperation between Eurojust and the Republic of Moldova ([17870/13](#)), which aims to strengthen their cooperation in combatting serious crime, in particular organised crime and terrorism.

ENLARGEMENT**Cooperation and verification mechanism**

The Council adopted conclusions on the cooperation and verification mechanism (CVM) for Bulgaria and Romania on the basis of the Commission's reports on the progress made by the two countries within the CVM framework ([5633/14](#) + [ADD 1](#), [5634/14](#) + [ADD 1](#)). This mechanism was established upon the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU, in order to help those countries to put in place an impartial, independent and effective judicial and administrative system.

TRADE POLICY**Anti-dumping measures - Footwear with uppers of leather - China**

The Council rejected a proposal aimed at re-imposing anti-dumping duties on imports of certain footwear with uppers of leather originating in China and produced by Brosmann Footwear (HK) Ltd, Seasonable Footwear (Zhongshan) Ltd, Lung Pao Footwear (Guangzhou) Ltd, Risen Footwear (HK) Co. Ltd and Zhejiang Aokang Shoes Co. Ltd ([7517/14](#)).

EU-Myanmar/Burma trade relations - Investment protection

The Council adopted a mandate for the Commission to negotiate an agreement on investment protection with Myanmar/Burma on behalf of the EU.

The mandate is composed of a decision of the Council and a decision of the representatives of the member states authorising the opening of negotiations, as well as directives for the negotiation of the agreement.

RESEARCH**Public-private partnerships in Horizon 2020 - Rules for participation**

The Council decided not to oppose the entry into force of a Commission regulation establishing derogations from the rules for participation in "Horizon 2020" (the EU framework programme for research and innovation) with regard to public-private partnerships.

The derogations will apply to the following joint undertakings:

- Innovative Medicines Initiative 2 ([6723/14](#));
- ECSEL (electronic components and systems) ([6725/14](#));
- Bio-Based Industries ([6726/14](#)); and
- Clean Sky 2 (aeronautics) ([6842/14](#)).

The regulation is a delegated act that can now enter into force, unless the European Parliament objects ([7218/14](#)).

See also press release:

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/141188.pdf

EU-Faroe Islands scientific and technological cooperation agreement

The Council authorised the opening of negotiations on an agreement for scientific and technological cooperation with the Faroe Islands, associating the Faroe Islands with "Horizon 2020", the EU framework programme for research and innovation for the period 2014 to 2020.

AGRICULTURE

Farm structure surveys - New type of data collected

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of a Commission regulation amending annex III to regulation 1166/2008 on farm structure surveys and the survey on agricultural production methods, as regards the list of characteristics to be collected in the farm structure survey 2016 ([7020/14](#)).

Regulation 1166/2008 provides for a programme of surveys on the structure of agricultural holdings, which is to run up to 2016.

The type of data collected in the farm structure survey had to be supplemented for monitoring the implementation of measures associated with the revision of the common agricultural policy after 2013. This covers in particular:

- information on nutrient and water use and agricultural production methods on agricultural holdings;
- additional statistics for the development of agri-environmental policy;
- improvement of the quality of agri-environmental indicators.

This Commission regulation is subject to the so-called regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that since the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt the regulation, unless the European Parliament objects.

APPOINTMENTS

European Economic and Social Committee

The Council appointed Mr Anton SZALAY (Slovakia) as a member of the European Economic and Social Committee for the remainder of the current term of office, which runs until 20 September 2015 ([7164/14](#)).